

one develops by pulling away hostilely from the past. The relation between form and content (the latter is to be understood not simply as a 'theme' but as a living complex of moods and ideas which seek artistic expression) is determined by the fact that a new form is discovered, proclaimed and developed under the pressure of an inner need, of a collective psychological demand, which, like all human psychology, has its roots in society.

This explains the dualism of every literary tendency; on the one hand, it adds something to the technique of art, heightening (or lowering) the general level of craftsmanship; on the other hand, in its concrete historical form, it expresses definite demands which, in the final analysis, have a class character. We are class, but this also means individual, because a class speaks through an individual. It also means national, because the spirit of a nation is determined by the class which rules it and which subjects literature to itself. [...]

What are we to understand under the term realism? At various periods, and by various methods, realism gave expression to the feelings and needs of different social groups. Each one of these realistic schools is subject to a separate and social literary definition, and a separate formal and literary estimation. What have they in common? A definite and important feeling for the world. It comes in a feeling for life as it is, in an artistic acceptance of reality, and not in a shrinking from it, in an active interest in the concrete stability and mobility of life. It is a striving either to picture life as it is or to idealize it, either to justify or to condemn it, either to photograph it or generalize and symbolize it, but it is always a preoccupation with our life of three dimensions as a sufficient and invaluable theme for art. In this large philosophical sense and not in the narrow sense of a literary school, one may say with certainty that the next will be realistic. [...]

This means a realistic monism, in the sense of a philosophy of life, and not a realism in the sense of the traditional arsenal of literary schools. On the contrary, the new artist will need all the methods and processes evolved in the past, as well as a few supplementary ones, in order to grasp the new life. And this is not going to be artistic eclecticism, because the unity of art is created by an active world-attitude and active life-attitude. [...]

2 André Breton (1896–1966) from the First Manifesto of Surrealism

Breton was introduced to Freudian analysis [see IA4] while serving in a medical capacity in the First World War. After the apparent exhaustion of Dada, Breton assumed the leadership of the left wing of the avant-garde, opposing the irrational and the work of the subconscious to the nationalism and technicism of the *Esprit Nouveau* group (see IIIA7). To this end he articulated the definitive formulation of the concept of Surrealism. The term had been coined by Apollinaire, who had also promoted the idea of a 'new spirit' (see IIIA2). Breton's first Manifesto of Surrealism was originally published in Paris in 1924. The present extracts are taken from the translation by R. Seaver and H.L. Lane in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Michigan, 1969.

Beloved imagination, what I most like in you is your unsparing quality. The mere word 'freedom' is the only one that still excites me. I deem it capable of indefinitely sustaining the old human fanaticism. It doubtless satisfies my only legitimate aspiration. Among all the many misfortunes to which we are tor, it is only fair to admit that we are allowed the greatest degree of freedom of thought. It is up to us not to misuse it. To reduce the imagination to a state of slavery – even though it would mean the elimination of what is commonly called happiness – is to betray all sense of absolute justice within oneself. Imagination alone offers me some intimation of what *can be*, and this is enough to remove to some slight degree the terrible injunction; enough, too, to allow me to devote myself to it without fear of making a mistake (as though it were possible to make a bigger mistake). Where does it begin to turn bad; and where does the mind's stability cease? For the mind, is the possibility of erring not rather the contingency of good? [...]

There remains madness, 'the madness that one locks up,' as it has aptly been described. That madness or another. We all know, in fact, that the insane are their incarceration to a tiny number of legally reprehensible acts and that were it not for these acts their freedom (or what we see as their freedom) would not be threatened. I am willing to admit that they are, to some degree, victims of their imagination, in that it induces them not to pay attention to certain rules outside of which the species feels itself threatened – which we are all supposed to know and respect. But their profound indifference to the way in which we judge them, and even to the various punishments meted out to them, allows us to suppose that they derive a great deal of comfort and consolation from their imagination, that they enjoy their madness sufficiently to endure the thought that its validity does not extend beyond themselves. And, indeed, hallucinations, illusions, etc., are not a source of trifling pleasure. [...]

The case against the realistic attitude demands to be examined, following the case against the materialistic attitude. The latter, more poetic in fact than the former, admittedly implies on the part of man a kind of monstrous pride which, admittedly, is monstrous, but not a new and more complete decay. It should have all be viewed as a welcome reaction against certain ridiculous tendencies of spiritualism. Finally, it is not incompatible with a certain nobility of thought.

By contrast, the realistic attitude, inspired by positivism, from Saint Thomas Aquinas to Anatole France, clearly seems to me to be hostile to any intellectual or moral advancement. I loathe it, for it is made up of mediocrity, hate, and dull conceit. It is this attitude which today gives birth to these ridiculous books, these insulting plays. It constantly feeds on and derives strength from the newspapers and stultifies both science and art by assiduously flattering the lowest of tastes; clarity bordering on stupidity, a dog's life. The activity of the best minds feels the effects of it; the law of the lowest common denominator finally prevails upon them as it does upon the others. [...]

• • • We are still living under the reign of logic. But in this day and age logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only facts relating

directly to our experience. Logical ends, on the contrary, escape us. It is pointless to add that experience itself has found itself increasingly circumscribed. It paces back and forth in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge. It too leans for support on what is most immediately expected and it is protected by the sentinels of common sense. Under the pressure of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy; forbidden it a kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practice. It was, apparently, by pure chance that a part of our mental world which pretended not to be concerned with any longer — and, in my opinion by far the most important part — has been brought back to light. For this we must put thanks to the discoveries of Sigmund Freud. On the basis of these discoveries a current of opinion is finally forming by means of which the human species will be able to carry his investigations much further; authorized as he is henceforth be not to confine himself solely to the most summary realities. The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights. If the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, then every reason to seize them — first to seize them, then, if need be, to submit them to the control of our reason. The analysts themselves have everything to gain by it. But it is worth noting that no means has been designated a priori for carrying out this undertaking, that until further notice it can be construed to be the province of poets as well as scholars, and that its success is so dependent upon the more or less capricious paths that will be followed.

Freud very rightly brought his critical faculties to bear upon the dream. It is in fact, inadmissible that this considerable portion of psychic activity (since at least from man's birth until his death, thought offers no solution of continuing the sum of the moments of dream from the point of view of time, and taking into consideration only the time of pure dreaming, that is the dreams of day is not inferior to the sum of the moments of reality, or, to be more precise, limiting, the moments of waking) has still today been so grossly neglected. I have always been amazed at the way an ordinary observer lends so much more credence and attaches so much more importance to waking events than to those occurring in dreams. It is because man, when he ceases to sleep, is above the plaything of his memory, and in its normal state memory takes pleasure in weakly retracing for him the circumstances of the dream, in stripping it of all real importance, and in dismissing the only *determinant* from the point where he thinks he has left it a few hours before: this firm hope, this concern. He is under the impression of continuing something that is worthwhile. Thus the dream finds itself reduced to a mere parenthesis, as is the night. And, like a night, dreams generally contribute little to furthering our understanding. The curious state of affairs seems to me to call for certain reflections.

1. Within the limits where they operate (or are thought to operate) dreams give every evidence of being continuous and show signs of organization. Memory alone arrogates to itself the right to excerpt from dreams, to ignore

visions, and to depict for us rather a series of dreams than the *dream itself*. In the same token, at any given moment we have only a distinct notion of states, the coordination of which is a question of will. What is worth noting about nothing allows us to presuppose a greater dissipation of the elements of such the dream is constituted. I am sorry to have to speak about it according to a formula which in principle excludes the dream. When will we have sleeping dreams, sleeping philosophers? I would like to sleep, in order to surrender myself to the dreamers, the way I surrender myself to those who read me with so wide open; in order to stop imposing, in this realm, the conscious rhythm of my thought. Perhaps my dream last night follows that of the night before, and will be continued the next night, with an exemplary strictness. *It's quite possible*, as the saying goes. And since it has not been proved in the slightest that in doing so, the 'reality' with which I am kept busy continues to exist in the state of dream, that it does not sink back down into the immemorial, why should I not grant to dreams what I occasionally refuse reality, that is, this state of certainty in itself which, in its own time, is not open to my repudiation? Should I not expect from the sign of the dream more than I expect from the state of consciousness which is daily more acute? Can't the dream also be used in solving the fundamental questions of life? Are these questions the same as one case as in the other and, in the dream, do these questions already exist? If the dream any less restrictive or punitive than the rest? I am growing old and more than that reality to which I believe I subject myself, it is perhaps in dream, the difference with which I treat the dream, which makes me grow

2. Let me come back again to the waking state. I have no choice but to consider it a phenomenon of interference. Not only does the mind display, in its state, a strange tendency to lose its bearings (as evidenced by the slips and mistakes the secrets of which are just beginning to be revealed to us), but, what matters, it does not appear that, when the mind is functioning normally, it fully responds to anything but the suggestions which come to it from the depths of that dark night to which I commend it. However conditioned it may be, its state is relative. It scarcely dares express itself and, if it does, it confines itself to verifying that such and such an idea, or such and such a woman, has said an impression on it. What impression it would be hard pressed to say, and such it reveals the degree of its subjectivity, and nothing more. This idea, as a woman, disturbs it; they tend to make it less severe. What they do is isolate its mind for a second from its solvent and spirit it to heaven, as the beautiful sculpture it can be, that it is. When all else fails, it then calls upon chance, its identity even more obscure than the others to whom it ascribes all its variations. Who can say to me that the angle by which that idea which affects us is offered, that what it likes in the eye of that woman is not precisely what it is to its dream, binds it to those fundamental facts which, through its own act it has lost? And if things were different, what might it be capable of? I would like to provide it with the key to this corridor. 3. The mind of the man who dreams is fully satisfied by what happens to him. The agonizing question of possibility is no longer pertinent. Kill, fly faster,

love to your heart's content. And if you should die, are you not certain of reawakening among the dead? Let yourself be carried along, events will not intrude your interference. You are nameless. The ease of everything is priceless.

What reason, I ask, a reason so much vaster than the other, makes dream seem so natural and allows me to welcome unreservedly a welter of episodes so strange that they would confound me now as I write? And yet I can believe in eyes, my ears, this great day has arrived, this beast has spoken.

If man's awaking is harder, if it breaks the spell too abruptly, it is because he has been led to make for himself too impoverished a notion of atonement.

4. From the moment when it is subjected to a methodical examination, when by means yet to be determined, we succeed in recording the contents of dream in their entirety (and that presupposes a discipline of memory spanning generations; but let us nonetheless begin by noting the most salient facts), when a graph will expand with unparalleled volume and regularity, we may hope that the mysteries which really are not will give way to the great Mystery. I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if we may so speak. It is in quest of this surreality that I am going, certain not to find it but too unmindful of my death not to calculate to some slight degree the joys of its possession.

A story is told according to which Saint-Pol-Roux, in times gone by, used to have a notice posted on the door of his manor house in Camaret, every evening before he went to sleep, which read: **THE POET IS WORKING.**

A great deal more could be said, but in passing I merely wanted to touch upon a subject which in itself would require a very long and much more detailed discussion. At this juncture, my intention was merely to mark a point in noting the *hate of the marvelous* which rages in certain men, this absurd beneath which they try to bury it. Let us not mince words: the marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful.

One evening, before I fell asleep, I perceived, so clearly articulated that it was impossible to change a word, but nonetheless removed from the sound of any voice, a rather strange phrase which came to me without any apparent relationship to the events in which, my consciousness agrees, I was involved, a phrase which seemed to me insistent, a phrase, if I may be so bold, which was *knocking at the window*. I took cursory note of it and prepared a move on when its organic character caught my attention. Actually, this phrase astonished me; unfortunately I cannot remember it exactly, but it was something like: 'There is a man cut in two by the window', but there could be no question of ambiguity, accompanied as it was by the faint visual image of a man walking cut half way up by a window perpendicular to the axis of his body. Beyond the slightest shadow of a doubt, what I saw was the simple reconstruction in space of a man leaning out a window. But this window having shifted with the man, I realized that I was dealing with an image of a fairly rare sort, and all I could think of was to incorporate it into my material for poetic construction. In

never had I granted it this capacity than it was in fact succeeded by a whole series of phrases, with only brief pauses between them, which surprised me only slightly less and left me with the impression of their being so gratuitous that the control I had then exercised upon myself seemed to me illusory and all I could think of was putting an end to the interminable quarrel raging within me.

Completely occupied as I still was with Freud at that time, and familiar as I was with his methods of examination which I had had some slight occasion to use on some patients during the war, I resolved to obtain from myself what we are trying to obtain from them, namely, a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as closely as possible, akin to *spoken thought*. It had seemed to me, and still does the way in which the phrase about the man cut in two had come to me, is an indication of it, that the speed of thought is no greater than the speed of speech, and that thought does not necessarily defy language, nor even the fast-moving pen. It was in this frame of mind that Philippe Soupault - to whom I had confided these initial conclusions - and I decided to blacken some paper, with a praiseworthy disdain for what might result from a literary point of view.

The ease of execution did the rest. By the end of the first day we were able to read to ourselves some fifty or so pages obtained in this manner, and begin to compare our results. All in all, Soupault's pages and mine proved to be remarkably similar: the same overconstruction, shortcomings of a similar nature, but also, on both our parts, the illusion of an extraordinary verve, a great deal of emotion, a considerable choice of images of a quality such that we would not have been capable of preparing a single one in longhand, a very special picturesque quality and, here and there, a strong comical effect. The only difference between our two texts seemed to me to derive essentially from our respective tempers, Soupault's being less static than mine, and, if he does not mind my offering this one slight criticism, from the fact that he had made the error of putting a few words, by way of titles at the top of certain pages, I suppose in a spirit of mystification. On the other hand, I must give credit where credit is due and say that he constantly and vigorously opposed any effort to touch or correct, however slightly, any passage of this kind which seemed to me unfortunate. In this he was, to be sure, absolutely right. It is, in fact, difficult to appreciate fairly the various elements present; one may even go so far as to say that it is impossible to appreciate them at a first reading. To you who write, these elements are, on the surface, as *strange to you as they are to anyone else*, and naturally you are wary of them. Poetically speaking, what strikes you about them above all is their *extreme degree of immediate absurdity*, the quality of this absurdity, upon closer scrutiny, being to give way to everything admissible, everything legitimate in the world: the disclosure of a certain number of properties and of facts no less objective, in the final analysis, than the others, in homage to Guillaume Apollinaire, who had just died and who, on several occasions, seemed to us to have followed a discipline of this kind, without

however having sacrificed to it any mediocre literary means, Soupault and I baptized the new mode of pure expression which we had at our disposal and which we wished to pass on to our friends, by the name of SURREALISM [...]

Those who might dispute our right to employ the term SURREALISM in its very special sense that we understand it are being extremely dishonest, for there can be no doubt that this word had no currency before we came along. Therefore, I am defining it once and for all:

SURREALISM, *a.* Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.

ENCYCLOPEDIA. *Philosophy.* Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life. [...]

... The mind which plunges into Surrealism relives with glowing excitement the best part of its childhood. For such a mind, it is similar to the certainty with which a person who is drowning reviews once more, in the space of less than a second, all the insurmountable moments of his life. Some may say to me that the parallel is not very encouraging. But I have no intention of encouraging those who tell me that. From childhood memories, and from others, there emanates a sentiment of being unintegrated, and then later of *having gone astray*, which I hold to be the most fertile that exists. It is perhaps childhood that comes closest to one's 'real life'; childhood beyond which one has at his disposal, aside from his *laissez-passer*, only a few complimentary tickets; childhood where everything nevertheless conspires to bring about its effective, risk-free possession of oneself. Thanks to Surrealism, it seems the opportunity knocks a second time. It is as though we were still running toward our salvation, or our perdition. In the shadow we again see a precious term. Thank God, it's still only Purgatory. With a shudder, we cross what the occultists call *dangerous territory*. In my wake I raise up monsters that are lying in wait; they are not yet too ill-disposed toward me, and I am not lost, since I fear them. [...]

Surrealism, such as I conceive of it, asserts our complete *nonconformism* clean enough so that there can be no question of translating it, at the trial of the real world, as evidence for the defense. It could, on the contrary, only serve to justify the complete state of distraction which we hope to achieve here below. Kant's absentmindedness regarding women, Pasteur's absentmindedness about grapes, Curie's absentmindedness with respect to vehicles, are in this regard profoundly symptomatic. This world is only very relatively in tune with thought and incidents of this kind are only the most obvious episodes of a war in which

I am proud to be participating. Surrealism is the 'invisible-ray' which will one day enable us to win out over our opponents. 'You are no longer trembling, man! This summer the roses are blue; the wood is of glass. The earth, draped in verdant cloak, makes as little impression upon me as a ghost. It is living and trying to live, that are imaginary solutions. Existence is elsewhere.'

Louis Aragon (1897–1982) et al. 'Declaration of the Bureau de Recherches Surréalistes'

At the beginning of 1925 the first two issues of the journal *La Révolution Surréaliste* were available, and Aragon's Surrealist 'novel' *Paysan de Paris* (Paris Peasant) had been published in the *Revue Européenne*. Works by Naville, Artaud, Eluard and others had also appeared. The intention of Surrealism was not, however, to be a mere literary movement but a revolutionary cultural practice. To this end, later in 1925 the Surrealists as a common cause with the Communist journal *Clarté*. This attempt to transcend the limits of a merely artistic practice is prefigured by the 'Declaration' issued under the aegis of the Bureau de Recherches Surréalistes on 27 January 1925. The Declaration had twenty-six signatories in addition to Aragon, including Breton, Eluard, Naville, Soupault, Artaud, Ernst and Masson. The present translation, by Richard Howard, is taken from Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, New York, 1965.

With regard to a false interpretation of our enterprise, stupidly circulated among the public,

We declare as follows to the entire braying literary, dramatic, philosophical, spiritual and even theological body of contemporary criticism:

We have nothing to do with literature;

but we are quite capable, when necessary, of making use of it like anyone else.

Surrealism is not a new means of expression, or an easier one, nor even a metaphysics of poetry.

It is a means of total liberation of the mind and of all that resembles it.

We are determined to make a Revolution.

We have joined the word *surrealism* to the word *revolution* solely to show ourselves disinterested, detached, and even entirely desperate character of this revolution.

We make no claim to change the *mores* of mankind, but we intend to show the fragility of thought, and on what shifting foundations, what caverns we have in our trembling houses.

We hurl this formal warning to Society: Beware of your deviations and errors, we shall not miss a single one.

At each turn of its thought, Society will find us waiting.

We are specialists in Revolt.

There is no means of action which we are not capable, when necessary, of employing.

We say in particular to the Western world: *surrealism* exists. And what is